

NOT PEACE, BUT A SWORD

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This journal would not be fulfilling its purpose of endeavouring to be an expression of contemporary mystical thought and interpretation if it failed to allude to the world-war now in progress and to attempt some evaluation of its interior significance. With its secular and surface aspects we need not here deal, but rather with its deeper-lying reasons and implications. Those accustomed to look beneath the surface of things know this to be no ordinary conflict. They realise that these cataclysmal events are not merely matters of national and military history, but that they have a cosmical value also ; that a struggle is in process of a more crucial character and quality than any of recent centuries ; that forces are in motion belonging not to the physical order alone, not represented solely by human armies and armaments ; and that something is taking place involving, whether for greater good or evil in the future, the possible subversion of current ideals of goodness, truth, and morals, and which challenges the validity of the religious conceptions by which modern civilisation professes to be actuated. One seeks for some interpretative clue to this sudden and far-reaching storm-burst, some guidance as to the reason for it, and, what is perhaps more important, some indication of our individual relationship to, and part in, a conflagration affecting universal society, and touching, impartially and searchingly, every living being in some susceptible and sensitive portion of his nature, be that his temporal organism and its needs or the more delicate fibres of his inward being.

Spiritual seers of comparatively modern times to

whom have been laid open the hidden working of cosmic forces concur in announcing the imminence of an upheaval which we can scarcely regard as other than the present crisis. The Epistles of Jacob Boehme, for instance, written just three centuries ago and dated, not a little significantly, from places situate at the very centre of the struggle of to-day, teem with distinct though discreetly obscured allusions to the present war, to the rival combatant nations, to the universal tribulation it must needs involve, to the spiritual nature of its causes—causes which have been accumulating for centuries prior to their present precipitation upon this outward plane of results,—and to its inevitable outcome. His allusions are too numerous to quote here, but one or two brief extracts may be usefully cited.¹ “Let no man say when the storm passeth by that this man or that is righteous before God; that it shall go well with him because of his religion. The anger of God is enkindled in *all*, and they are all alike unto him for all their religion. . . . The Most High sweepeth out one besom with another; *but there springeth up a lily to all nations*. Happy are they that apprehend the same.” And again: “I give you to understand that this present time is seriously to be taken into consideration, for the *seventh* angel in the Revelation hath prepared his *trumpet*; the powers of heaven be in peculiar motion; moreover, both gates stand open, and light and darkness are in great desire.” The import of these words will depend upon the reader’s familiarity with the cardinal principles of Boehme’s doctrine and the peculiar meaning attaching to his terminology. The point to be noted in them is the writer’s entire impartiality. Writing as a mystic and with a mystic’s sure grasp of human solidarity, no nation is singled out either for justification or condemnation. Boehme is far beyond the bias of patriotic considerations. It is not a matter with him of a casual quarrel between certain countries over disputed rights,

¹ Allusions to the war will be found in the modern reprint (Thomson, Glasgow) of the 1649 edition of Boehme’s *Epistles*, on pp. 60-1, 69, 104-5, 116, 140-1, 144, 156, 160-1, 173, 185, 202-3, 211, 213.

territory, or offended honour. Pretexts of that kind would come to be raised on the surface of things, but he declares that at root the struggle is one affecting all humanity and based upon an interior conflict of spiritual light and spiritual darkness, forces as much occulted from sensuous observation as the electric energies that vent themselves in a thunderstorm; forces, moreover, not present and awakened in this or that people only, but “enkindled in *all*” and therefore involving the whole of human society in their operation. Whatever the merits of the dispute in its temporal aspect, there was destined to be, he saw, a cosmic upheaval, involving a searching general purgation, a shaking of all nations, and one generated automatically by the inherent evil distributed throughout them all coming into clash with their own aspirations for larger good.

Rather more than a century after Boehme these prognostications were reasserted by Swedenborg. He too emphasised the impending close of a cyclic period involving—as the Vedantist religio-philosophy of India also teaches—an influx from the spiritual world into external nature to redress the accumulated excess of evil in the latter. Without some such periodical purgation as war involves, he wrote, evil would remain enclosed within the organism of natural man, who “is by truth a little hell, between which and heaven there is perpetual disagreement.” The causes of war, he says, are due to the permissive laws of Divine Providence. “There are many causes lying hidden in the treasury of Divine Wisdom why the greater wars are not repressed by the Lord in the kings and generals. . . . Some of these have been revealed to me, among which is this, that all wars, however political they are, are representative in heaven of states of the church¹ and that they are correspondences. Such were all the wars described in the Word; such also are all wars at this day. . . . All things that occur in the natural

¹ By “the church” Swedenborg sometimes implies human society generally, both here and in the unseen, and sometimes the race or nation—Egypt, Israel, Christendom—charged with the form of religious expression intended to characterise a given epoch.

world correspond in the spiritual world to spiritual things, and spiritual things concern the church. It is not known in this world what kingdoms in Christendom now represent the Moabites and Ammonites, the Syrians and Philistines, the Chaldeans and Assyrians, and the other nations with whom the children of Israel waged war; yet there are those who represent them. But it also cannot be seen at all in this world what the character of the church is on earth, and what the evils are into which it is falling, and on account of which it is punished by wars; for in this world only the externals are visible, which do not constitute the church. But it is seen in the spiritual world where the internals appear in which the church itself consists. And there they are all connected, according to their various states. The conflict of these in the spiritual world corresponds to wars, which are on both sides governed by the Lord correspondentially according to the course of His Divine Providence.”¹

Elsewhere Swedenborg speaks of the fact having been revealed to him that modern orthodox Christianity had become spiritually effete and bankrupt, and was about to come to an end. “For the church on earth is the foundation of heaven, since the influx of good and truth through the heavens from the Lord ultimately terminates in the good and truth of the man of the church. Thus when the man of the church is in such a perverted state as no longer to admit the influx of good and truth, the powers of the heaven are said to be shaken (Matt. xxiv. 29). On this account it is always provided that somewhat of the church should remain, and that when an old church perishes a new church should be established. That the Christian Church as it is to-day is so far consummated and devastated cannot be seen by those on earth, by those who have confirmed themselves in its falsities.”²

It must be remembered that Swedenborg is in no sense inveighing against the religion of Christ, but,

¹ *Divine Providence*, n. 251.

² *Arcana Cælestia*, n. 4060; and *True Christian Religion Revealed*, n. 758-9.

as the Hebrew prophets thundered against the vain formalism of Jewry, indicated that in its modern expression it had become entirely materialised and ineffectual, and must be displaced by a new expression as a prelude to which human society must undergo a radical purge. He declared that the first and elementary conception of the verities, to manifest which the Incarnation of our Lord occurred, had served its time and purpose and must now be replaced by an advanced conception, and by a more practical adaptation of His teaching in human conduct. “The end of the world”—that is, the termination of a cyclic period—is at hand, both on earth and in the spheres beyond, and the transition from the old cycle to the new is, Swedenborg affirms, that which, with its premonitory signs, is described in the 24th chapter of St Matthew’s Gospel.

The above testimonies might be amplified, did space permit,¹ but enough has been said to enable those who read the foregoing utterances to judge of their validity at the present juncture. Let us add a few considerations made possible by the course of events since they were uttered.

Humanity has come at last—in recent years that coming has been silently, but enormously, speeded up—to be so closely knit, its units to be so mutually interdependent, as already to have developed what it speaks of as a social consciousness, an awareness

¹ Attention may be drawn to the vivid vision of present events by Anna Kingsford, in 1877 (*Life*, 3rd ed., vol. i. pp. 201-2). It is of another order of vision and perhaps less reliably interpreted in matters of detail, from those above cited, but like them it associates the crisis with the absolute materialisation of Christian truth. The following details from it may be quoted as of present interest: “The Catholic Church has all truth, but the priesthood has materialised it. I perceive a great war in Europe. All Europe seems at war. It seems to me as if France were about to be destroyed utterly. The invader’s helmet has a spike. O Paris, utterly destroyed! But when is this to be? Years hence perhaps. A prophet can never judge of time. Even Jesus did not know the time of the fulfilment of His predictions. ‘Of the day and the hour no man knoweth, not even the Son, but the Father only.’ All France is doomed. Part will be a German province. I see England in possession of Calais, Normandy, and the Brittany coast; yes, of all the northern shore of France. Belgium seems to me to be Prussian. In spite of all the Catholic Church holds on to the end.”

of its own homogeneity. Its appropriation of the whole of the world's surface, the intellectual linking up of its several parts, its rapid universal distribution of thought and ideas, its annihilation of time and distance by its own myriad scientific ingenuities, the extreme sensitiveness of its mouth and pocket to economic fluctuations of its own creation, have all tended to expedite racial consolidation and contributed to the unification of its many-millioned parts, until even the plain non-mystical man in the street has been forced into a crude and elementary perception of the mystical truth that, even in respect of its ephemeral outward nature, humanity is a single organism of which every part is essential to the well-being of every other part, and that every man is indeed, and, by the necessity of things, demonstrably his brother's keeper. Surely a vast race-gain, this perception—which has been brought about, observe, not by deliberate adaptation of conduct to the theory or ideal of some *doctrinaire*, whether political or religious, but which is the result of actual life-experience—the greatest of all teachers—gained by contact with the conditions and force-currents that control human destiny. But the true significance of this race-gain lies in the fact that the perception of unity in respect of the race's external, material nature is the prelude to a larger vision—for the order of development is "first that which is natural; afterwards that which is spiritual,"—the vision, long clear to a mystical minority, which discloses that not the collective outward forms of men only, but their aggregated inward being, constitutes the one Mystical Body of Christ, the Cosmic Temple of the Divine Spirit, the dwelling-place of the Shechinah. It suffices for the moment that, under Providence working through the compelling pressure of temporal events, a stage of human experience has been reached which has never previously been realised or possible, but which was necessarily preparative to the realisation of the root-truth of the mystical corporateness of God and Man. After a period of exhaustive investigation of his material environment, man finds himself at last flung back upon

himself. His inquisitive outward-searching mind has ascertained the possibilities of the physical world and knows its limits and limitations. He has interrogated nature to the farthest reach of his natural faculties, and been brought only to an *impasse*. There remains to him now but one more kingdom to exploit—the kingdom which is within himself. Such is the position into which, through good and ill, through peace and strife alike, the shepherding hand of the Master of Life has at last manœuvred him. And that hand is outstretched still.

But when a new and compelling truth, going to the roots of life and calculated to revolutionise practical conduct, rises above the horizon of consciousness, either in an individual or in human society generally, it at once encounters fierce opposition from subtle perverse elements latent within the very organism that is being called to take a progressed view of its own nature and purpose. Self-examination will verify this fact for the individual; historical enquiry will demonstrate it upon the larger scale of the world's life. The advent of historic Christianity was wellnigh strangled by the opposition of the civilisation then existing; and to-day the advent of mystical Christianity, the coming of which has been prepared for in multifarious ways, is meeting with similar opposition manifesting in ways characteristic of the present age. In dealing with this subject in the brief generalised way in which alone it is practicable to refer to it here, it is impossible to indicate the several and extremely complex processes at work; processes present in both the seen and the unseen worlds, which have culminated and are expressing themselves in a European war, which is but the material "signature" or externalisation of forces in conflict upon withdrawn planes of life. "There was (and there is to-day) war in heaven"—upon the plane of the physically unmanifest; and its physical reflex betokens the purgation of evil and dispersion of darkness, materialism, and selfishness, before the advancing ingress of the Light of the World into the body corporate of humanity, which, as has been said above, is already imbued with the instinct of the vast identity of human

interest and is becoming ripe for translating that instinct into practical conduct and spiritual life. The Divine Hand, working through its creatures in the visible and invisible worlds simultaneously, gains its ends and displays its economy by manipulating the elements of good and evil, of wrath and love, distributed throughout those creatures, with a view to effecting, out of strife, a larger revelation of itself. In Boehme's words (9th Epistle, 13), "As the eternal God hath manifested Himself through the time, and bringeth the eternal wonders, through the time, into combat, that through the combat that which is hidden might open itself and be brought to light; even so in strife and combat the great mystery must be revealed in man, where God's anger and love are in combat and strife."

Since the Great Magnet was lifted up, who promised to draw all men unto Him, twenty centuries have not passed without accomplishing vast spiritual results that are seldom reflected upon; without generating behind the outer veil of things enormous energies of which many fruits are perceptible; without ingarnering into, and consolidating with, Him the life of uncountable souls as His co-workers for the world's redemption. For that work He has "ordained and constituted the services of men and angels in a wonderful order"—an order of which but a small fraction is now manifest to us—but which, as its compelling energies press in upon us from the unmanifested planes, and separate light from darkness and wheat from chaff, we must contemplate in its entirety if we are at all rightly to interpret the meaning of the present upheaval. "Not peace, but a sword" was to be a sign of His presence. But do we understand the implication of that familiar saying, or still adhere to its popular materialised interpretation? The outward and literal sword we know too well, and it is doing its fell work to-day. But in correspondence with it is a more secret and impalpable sword, one which turneth every way and in every man alike, and one by which those who take it must needs perish to the extent of their taking. The Psalmist has defined it for us: "Deliver my soul from 'the wicked'

—which is Thy sword"¹; it is the evil and materialising tendencies inherent and accumulated in man himself; the wickedness embodied and entrenched in all his institutions and frustrating the cosmic redemptive action of the incorruptible Spirit. The seeds of larger good for the world in general, as we have said, have already been sown, and in this present war—which is the challenge of evil to them—is the evidence of their strong vitality. Whatever tribulations it involves, and whatever form its issues may assume in the temporal history of this or that nation, there is no fear that the mastery will not lie with those forces and elements in us which make for light rather than with those of reaction and darkness. Much dross will disappear in this purging crucible; many conventions and ideals will be shattered alike in private and social life; even the regretted destruction of hoary and honoured Christian shrines seems like a sign that in religion also the old order changeth, yielding place to new. Amid all the devastation there will be no waste save of that which it is desirable should be wasted, and no ultimate loss; but rather a legacy of improved distribution of power, both human and divine, of better perception of humanity's vital and ultimate interests, and of freer moral and spiritual development than our self-made limitations of the past would permit until a drastic pruning has taken place.

And peace! "Give peace in our time, O Lord!" we are all praying. Yes; but peace of what kind; and what do we mean by "our time"? Peace in the world's sense, involving a few more years' opportunity for selfish ease and sense-gratification; peace for renewed chances of money-making; peace that shall permit continued vice-growth, and starvation and stagnancy of the spirit's life; peace that means but "a little more sleep, a little more slumber—of the soul—a little more folding of the hands—the higher spiritual activities—to rest?" To that prayer the answer is as now—not peace, but a sword. Or the peace which passeth understanding? and passeth it for the simple reason that we will not yield ourselves

¹ Ps. xvii. 13.

up to experiencing and so understanding it. Unconscious of it though we be, peace there always is in the submerged, divine depths of us; in our eternal centres, grafted in God. But peace "in our *time*"—the peace of God realised in our temporal and surface-consciousness, for time is but an inhibition of our spirit's consciousness—will never be known to us until "the outside becomes as the inside" by our permitting that to come to the circumference which now lies buried at the centre. "For *He* is our peace, who hath made both one . . . making in Himself of twain one new man; so making peace."¹ And to-day the inward Christ presses forward from within into larger incarnation and manifestation in the human race, welding into unity His divinity with our humanity so that the twain shall in due time constitute in Himself "one new man." Clouds and darkness are around this His further or "second" coming, by which the powers of the heavens are shaken even as all nations are being shaken in the birth-throes of a new age, in which the Desire of all nations shall come and the Prince of Peace be better known among men.

Those who realise this will aspire for peace after this manner, both for themselves and all others. They will not be the less, but rather far more, sensitive than their more obtusely organised fellow-men to the outward tribulation, the horrors and malignities of the time, and to the whirlwind currents of evil that are sweeping through and testing the inward regions of their being. But they will watch the signs of the times and be ready against the day that the tumult subsides, when many will be needed to serve as focus-points and media through which will permeate and pour forth the fertilising streams of Life that are waiting to invigorate the world. And they will realise the purport of Boehme's haunting and often iterated words, that among all the temporal evils attending this time of painful crisis and transition "A lily blossometh upon the mountains and in the valleys in all the ends of the earth. He that seeketh, findeth."

¹ Eph. ii. 14-15.